

# Cultural Resources—Maximizing the Benefits of Our Heritage, Talents & Diversity

*The occasion of our municipal bicentennial in 2005 calls to mind the value of our cultural heritage and the opportunities offered by certain cultural assets. Some of the City's more successful events have resulted from a mixture of cultural traditions. The broad mixture of themes, activities and participants in the City's Independence Day parade serves as a good example. In the past, the City has supported cultural activities for its citizens and cultural events that served to promote commerce; the most successful programs would accomplish both purposes.*

The City provides and supports a wide variety of cultural activities to enhance the quality of life for its residents. The Parks and Recreation Department serves as the City's administrator of these activities, as the technical experts, and as the liaison for cultural events. The Parks and Recreation Department provides all age groups with a wide variety of year-round leisure activities including free classes in gymnastics and sports, as well as bus trips to sporting and cultural events. In addition, the City of Fairfax Regional Library (see Public Facilities and Services) provides significant cultural opportunities with an extensive collection of volumes and special history and music collections.

## Existing Special Events

The City sponsors many annual special events that offer a taste of the culture and traditions observed in the City. These major annual events include a wide variety of cultural themes spread fairly evenly through the year.

- Each February, the City of Fairfax sponsors a weekend-long **Chocolate Lovers Festival**. This event not only provides weekend activities for City residents; it also provides opportunities for local merchants to exhibit and sell traditional and exotic chocolate confections to chocolate lovers who gather from all across the Northern Virginia region.
- In April the City, together with George Mason University, sponsors **Spotlight on the Arts**. This event features art exhibits, plays, dance, and choral, jazz and classical ensembles at locations spread throughout the City and the University.
- During the first weekend in May each year the City helps to sponsor the **Blenheim Civil War Encampment** along with Historic Fairfax City, Inc. and the 17th Virginia Infantry, Company D "Fairfax Rifles". This event features period music, military muster, drill and firing demonstrations.
- The City recently initiated the **Family Fun Fest** to promote a Saturday of activities for the entire family. Children's arts and crafts, balloons, face painting, and inflatable play structures fill the afternoon, while a variety of live entertainment shows lead into an outdoor movie beginning at dusk.
- The City's annual **4th of July** celebration, cosponsored by the City of Fairfax and the Independence Day Celebration Committee, is the largest in the Washington metropolitan region. The parade features floats, marching bands and a variety of cultural exhibits in motion. The events later in the day include the Old Fashioned Fireman's Day competition and family picnics, culminating in family entertainment and fireworks at Fairfax High School.
- Each September brings the **Fall for the Book** festival, centered in downtown Fairfax and the George Mason University campus. This three-day event, cosponsored by the City and the University, offers activities for readers of all ages, including readings, discussions, lectures and exhibits by nationally recognized writers.
- In October the City produces the **Fall Festival**, which started out as a small market for artisans to display their

wares but has grown to an annual event, offering over 500 arts, crafts, information and food vendors. The Fall Festival now includes a carnival, along with a New Car Show provided by the Fairfax City Auto Dealers Association, and live entertainment. A key component of the success of the Fall Festival is the City's hometown community atmosphere.

- The *Holiday Craft Show*, sponsored annually by the City in November, has grown in number of artisans, variety of crafts, number of attendees, and total sales since its inception in 1987. Artists from all over the United States now join our local artists in offering a wide variety of holiday gifts.
- In early December the City joins the Downtown Fairfax Coalition in producing the annual *Festival of Lights and Carols* in downtown Fairfax. This event features sleigh/hayrides, a Yule log, holiday illumination of the downtown Historic District, an evening of caroling, the lighting of the City tree, family holiday activities, refreshments and a visit from Santa Claus. Singers close the evening with traditional carols.

## Existing Year-Round and Seasonal Events

- Throughout the year, the City sponsors a speaker series, held at Old Town Hall.
- The City holds a concert series, which includes events held at both the Veteran's amphitheater on City Hall grounds as well as at Old Town Hall.
- Every summer, the City sponsors *Fairfax Rocks the Park*, in which several popular music concerts are held in the bowl area of Van Dyck Park.
- Every summer, the City has a weekly farmer's market held at Van Dyck Park. The Downtown Fairfax Coalition also holds a weekly farmers market at the corner of North and Main Street near Truro Episcopal Church

## Existing Supporting Facilities

Community groups, civic associations, and religious organizations use the City's elementary schools, Lanier Middle and Fairfax High School as well as the John C. Wood Center, the former Green Acres Elementary School, Old Town Hall and City Hall for meetings, athletic league activities, cultural programming, religious services, and rehearsal space. Recognizing the need for classroom and physical space, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) has worked to identify the specific needs that might be fulfilled by a community center. Beginning with a Citywide survey in 1988, PRAB found the need for facilities to support youth/teen classes, children's activities, senior adult programs, community theater, seminars, athletics and day care. A 1996 follow-up study by a consultant identified the need for a regulation gymnasium, outdoor athletic fields, and multipurpose space. City Council has considered several alternative locations for the community center, most prominently the former Green Acres Elementary School and the John C. Wood Complex. The decision concerning the most appropriate location for the community center is tied to the broader issue of locating other City facilities as part of the expansion of City Hall, the construction of a new police building and the ultimate disposition of the Green Acres Elementary School property.

## George Mason University as a Cultural Resource

George Mason University contributes greatly to the presence of arts in the Central Fairfax Area. The GMU Center for the Arts is a major performance facility that seats 1,933 spectators. The Center for the Arts, which was completed in 1990, has a busy performance schedule that includes both campus productions and professional touring artists and companies. The University's Patriot Center, primarily the home venue for GMU's basketball and volleyball teams, augments the Center for the Arts' performance schedule as a venue for popular music acts,

circuses and other events requiring larger facilities and crowd capacities.

In addition to these larger events, speakers and other performers will also periodically visit the GMU campus. Although many of these events are open to the public, they are generally not widely advertised and require citizens to check the university's "Today at Mason" web page to keep informed of upcoming events.

Visual art facilities at GMU include a Gallery in the Johnson Center as well as the Concert Hall Gallery, and gallery in the Fine Arts Building and the Krasnow Institute. Temporary exhibits and showcases of student work can also be found in the halls of the Fine Arts Building.

GMU also provides the community with cinematic presentations that augment the offerings at the area's commercial theatres. In addition to a Johnson Center Cinema schedule, which includes both popular and independent films during their "second run" periods, the university also holds occasional film festivals featuring international and independent/art cinema titles not usually seen in commercial theatres. During the summer, GMU is host to Cinema Under the Stars, an outdoor movie series that is free of charge and features food from local restaurants.

Another important entertainment contribution GMU makes to the community is providing a broad array of sporting events. Competing in NCAA Division I, GMU fields a team in every major sport except for football. Other than basketball, most sports have free or very low-cost admissions.

## Private Sector Cultural Facilities

In addition to the Cultural facilities that the City and GMU provide, there exist several private venues for the presentation of cultural events. The Cinema Arts theatre, located in Fair City Mall, is a six-screen movie complex that devotes most of its screen time to features not seen in most commercial multiplexes, especially away from the metropolitan area's urban core. Cinema Arts also stages occasional special events such as film festivals based on a particular ethnic or national cinema, in addition to having a Sunday morning club devoted to the screening of unreleased or low profile films.

Occasionally the City has had several sales-oriented art galleries. While these facilities are in short supply, such galleries should be targeted for location in the expanded retail space likely in the future renovation of Old Town. Other private-sector cultural facilities that should be targeted for Old Town include dinner theatres, additional movie theatres, establishments offering live music and culinary schools.

## Culture as a Tourism Generator

The City of Fairfax has all of the "ingredients" that are necessary for the development of a highly successful tourism industry. Many of these ingredients are related to the culture of the City. Its history, architecture, landscapes, art, restaurants and diversity are among the more valued by tourists. The further development of cultural facilities—with a mind to their value to tourists—could greatly benefit the City's efforts to promote tourism.

Existing programs such as the historic properties walking tours, the Old Town Fairfax design guidelines, GMU resources and the monthly special events could be easily tied together to provide ongoing attractions for tourists in ways that also benefit the residents of the City. In a similar manner, new facilities could be provided for the residents' enjoyment and funded over time by the increased revenues from tourism.

The proven interest in Civil War history in the City provides an opportunity for theatrical productions built around Mosby's raid, the Antonia Ford story, or even a family's letters bringing war news home from the front. Existing walking tours could take a more physical form through a connection of pedestrian plazas, more prominent (though appropriate) signage, and history-related statuary that is uniquely Fairfax. Better connections to pedestrian and bicycle trails from Old Town Fairfax and other City properties, along with the addition of nearby environmental attractions such as a City Arboretum and/or Aquatic Gardens would not only provide benefits City residents, but would also provide additional reason for tourists to spend time in the City.

While the City has a well-established base of restaurants, the further development of ethnic restaurants in the City would promote the City's tourism efforts. The City would also benefit from the development of restaurants and shops that would further the City's tourism efforts.



# Cultural Resources— Goal, Objective & Strategies

*Goal: Promote the provision of cultural features into the built environment as a means of promoting tourism.*

*Objective CR-1 Develop cultural facilities that will promote tourism and enhance community interaction.*

## **Strategies**

### **CR-1.1 Take full advantage of the opportunities to promote tourism afforded by the City's cultural assets.**

Provide physical connections among historic sites, pedestrian plazas, public art, restaurants, bed and breakfast establishments and performing arts facilities to promote the interaction available to tourists. Concentrate community appearance features in tourist areas.

### **CR-1.2 Provide a community center facility to support a large number and wide range of cultural activities in the City.**

The City should plan and promote facilities that could accommodate a broad mixture of activities. A community center should be available to accommodate large citywide groups and smaller groups of various sizes in a mix of activities that may change several times over the course of a day.

### **CR-1.3 Enhance the quality of life for City residents while capitalizing on the commercial opportunities offered by existing and potential future cultural events.**

The City should continue to offer numerous and broad-based cultural events while increasing their effectiveness in addressing economic development issues. Additional cultural events should be chosen to address the cultural heritage of groups that represent increasing populations within the City. Encourage businesses that contribute to the success of our cultural events and to the cultural diversity of the City.

### **CR-1.4 Promote the development of restaurants and shops with a regional or national market.**

The City should plan recognize the value of increased market size by promoting the development of restaurants and shops that relate to the tourism themes that develop with the City's tourism industry.

### **CR-1.5 Foster greater awareness of GMU-related cultural and entertainment events among City residents.**

George Mason University hosts literally hundreds of cultural events in a given calendar year. Unfortunately, many of the events, while potentially of interest to City residents, are not actively promoted to the community. Efforts should be made to create a higher profile for GMU events among City residents. Possible approaches could include making a direct link to the GMU events calendar from the City Home Page and to list GMU events on City Screen 12.

